

Taproot

A photograph showing three people in blue jackets and dark pants working together to plant a young tree in a field. One person on the left is holding the tree's trunk, another in the center is looking on, and a third on the right is adjusting the branches. The background is a lush green field with trees and a yellow banner at the bottom.

**Foothills
Conservancy of
North Carolina
2020**

Our Land Trust

Mission

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina inspires conservation in Western North Carolina by permanently protecting land and water for the benefit of people and all living things.

Vision

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina envisions a thriving region to live and visit, with clean water, healthy forests, productive farmland, diverse wildlife, access to outdoor recreation, and communities that value conservation.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Foothills Conservancy serves eight counties: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Lincoln, McDowell, and Rutherford, in three major river basins: the Broad, Catawba, and Yadkin.

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Beth Willard-Patton, Associate Director
Tom Kenney, Land Protection Director
Ryan Sparks, Stewardship Director
Sophie Elliott, Development Coordinator
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Cover Photo: Volunteers plant trees at Catawba Meadows Park in Morganton

Front Cover, Back Cover, Pages 4, 28 & 30-33
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Pages 22-24 Photographs by **Equinox Environmental**



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A Letter from the Executive Director



Writer and poet Ryunosuke Satoro once said, "Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean." In these final months of a turbulent year, I find myself indebted to the multitude of supporters, followers, landowners and partners who have made waves in 2020.

A common term in the world of land conservation is resiliency — often referring to land that will persist and remain habitable for plant and animal species as our climate changes. This year has tested the resiliency of our entire society, let alone our land trust. I admire the resiliency of the conservancy staff, our board of directors, summer interns and our supporters. Through months of paused events, virtual meetings and the "joys" of technology, and frequent unknowns in life both at work and at home, our team has remained determined, engaged and, most of all, creative.

I am grateful for the ways that 2020 has forced us all to broaden our perspectives in conservation work, prompting us to find innovative ways to navigate through the workday. Because of this, we felt it was critical to invite

those who surround our work — our partner organizations, community members and supporters — to share their words and ideas this year. I am thrilled to include articles by guest writers Chris Grant, Owen Carson, Seth Hawkins, Alicia Wilfong and Paul Thompson in this issue, and I thank these individuals for offering their unique perspectives.

Since the last Taproot was released in fall 2019, we have lost some outstanding members of the conservation community, who have left behind legacies that will continue to move our organization forward for years and generations to come. Some made the ultimate gift by generously including the conservancy in their estate plans, bequeathing land or money to continue their conservation support in spirit. Others were memorialized through gifts to the conservancy made by loved ones, forever linking these individuals to our work.

Despite the challenges of 2020, I'd like to highlight a few of our successes, many of which you'll read about in this magazine: Our Big Backyard summer camp was held virtually in July, providing 60 campers with a fun, interactive environmental education experience. Due to its virtual setting, this year's camp served more children in our service area than any previous year. In September, we purchased the entire Oak Hill Community Park and Forest property, an ambitious 650-acre project that has been close to our hearts since 2018. As we prepare to celebrate our 25th anniversary, our land protection record exceeds 60,000 acres since our humble beginnings in 1995. On a larger scale, the Great American Outdoors Act was officially signed into law, making a positive impact on protected areas nationwide.

I'd like to offer a personal "thank you" to each of you for every instance of your support — though I'm afraid if I fully encapsulated my gratitude to all who have made our successes possible, I would lose my voice midway through the list. I hope that this magazine does justice to the work of our conservation champions, who ensure that Foothills Conservancy's mission may continue to resonate, forever.

Sincerely,

Andrew Kota
Executive Director

By the Numbers

Conservation Record

2019: 4,466 acres permanently conserved

In 2019, Foothills Conservancy and our public and private partners invested \$2,982,187 to protect 4,466 acres in 14 projects, leveraged by \$225,912 in donated land value. 1995-2019: 59,394 Acres Protected.

Financial Summary

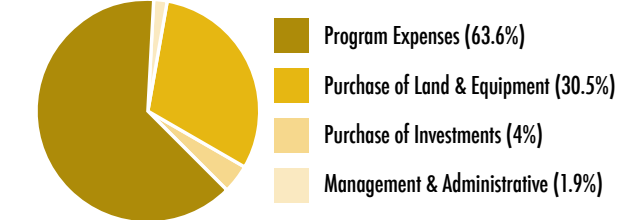
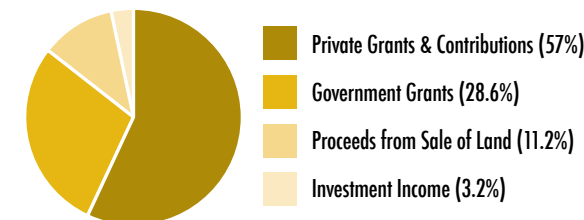
January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019

Fiscal Year 2019 Sources of Funds

Private grants & contributions.....	\$3,607,566
Government grants.....	\$1,809,424
Proceeds from sale of land.....	\$707,117
Investment income.....	\$200,689
Other.....	\$3,575
Total Source of Funds.....	\$6,328,371

Fiscal Year 2019 Use of Funds

Program Services:	
Purchase of land and equipment.....	\$2,051,292
Purchase of investments.....	\$270,850
Program expenses.....	\$4,281,678
Management and Administrative.....	\$125,145
Total Use of Funds.....	\$6,728,965



FCNC ASSETS

	2019	2018
Current Assets		
Cash & Equivalents.....	\$4,402,966	\$2,798,760
Receivables.....	\$109,834	\$25,090
Prepaid Expenses.....	\$0	\$0
Total Current Assets.....	\$4,512,800	\$2,823,850
Long-term Assets		
Conservation Property & Equipment.....	\$10,589,463	\$10,111,559
Total Long-Term Assets.....	\$10,589,463	\$10,111,559
Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....	\$15,102,263	\$12,935,409

FCNC LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities.....	\$188,130	\$115,000
Total Net Assets.....	\$14,914,133	\$12,820,409
Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....	\$15,102,263	\$12,935,409

ENDOWMENT & RESERVE FUNDS (as of Dec 31 2019)

Easement Stewardship Endowment Fund.....	\$551,593	\$400,545
Preserve Stewardship Endowment Fund.....	\$287,520	\$158,407
Burke County Endowment Fund.....	\$67,154	\$57,863
Blue Ridge Foothills Fund.....	\$1,333,583	\$1,122,984
Preserve Maintenance Fund BB&T.....	\$63,170	\$42,738
Land Acquisition Fund BB&T.....	\$1,492,379	\$410,861
Legal Defense Fund BB&T.....	\$134,262	\$119,286
For Now & Forever Fund BB&T.....	\$0	\$101,230
Program & Operations Reserve Fund BB&T.....	\$540,338	\$442,604

A Park is Born

Oak Hill Community Park & Forest

In 2020, a 652-acre parcel of undeveloped land in Burke County — dotted with forests and agricultural fields, and flowing with pristine creek waters — went from “potential park” to, officially, the Oak Hill Community Park and Forest.

Following two years of community outreach, public meetings and fundraising, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina completed the acquisition on October 2, 2020.

With guidance from Destination by Design, the next steps are to plan and build out the park and forest to include amenities such as public trails and parking, educational kiosks and possibly primitive camping sites.

The conservancy extends its most sincere gratitude to the individuals, neighbors, businesses, churches and foundations whose contributions made it possible to forever protect the Oak Hill Community Park and Forest:

Tim & Margaret Andrews
Aram & Linda Attarian
Joe Avery
Ellis & Barbara Aycock
Julian & Sylvia Bajorek
Patricia Bell
Barbara Beier
Bob & Donna Benner
Tom & Beth Blanton
Blue Ridge Healthcare Hospitals
Medical Staff

Debbie Bradley
Roby Braswell & Julie Dickison
Keith & Karen Breedlove
Martha Bumgarner
Frances Burke Urr
Camp Lake James Stewardship Fund
Catawba Wateree Water
Management Group
David & Loralie Clark
Larry & Patricia Clark
North Carolina Land & Water Fund

Community Foundation
of Burke County
Conservation Trust for North Carolina
Ann & George Costello
Deborah Davis
Hal Davis
Sonni & Sandy Dyer
Duke Energy Foundation -
Powerful Communities program
Al Fischer
Deborah & Charles Fisher

Mary Ann Flood
Jimmy & Mary Lou Furr
Glass Foundation
Grace Glenn
Margaret Gordon
Grace Episcopal Church Foundation
Jim & Janice Gravely
Glenn Grossman
Margaret & Peter Hampson
Ann Henderson
Bruce & Lynn Henderson
Sarah & Dan Hoyle
Huffman Cornwell Foundation
Clara Hunt
Jefferies Kendall Foundation, Inc.
Deborah Johnson
Frances Jones
Kim & Kathleen Jurell
L. H. Kirksey
W. Carl Kirksey
Dominic Lepore
Matthew & Katherine Lindsay
Randy & Lea Loftis

Clinton Lytle
Jeff & Carol MacKinney
Nikki & Phil Malatin
John & Terri Martino
David M. McCall
Dennis McGill
Members of Quaker Meadows
Presbyterian Church
Denise Michaud
Wallace & Ann Moncrief
Jeff Morgan
Courtney Mull
J. Alex & Vivian G. Mull Foundation
Charles Nantz & the Oak Hill UMC
Sunday School Class
Don & Regina Nesbitt
N.C. DOJ Environmental
Enhancement Grant Program
Betty Orders
Rod & Wanda Orders
Overmountain Cycles
Richard & Shara Owensby
Joyce Pharr
Bercie Price

Nancy Puckett
Kurt Reid
Karen Ricker
Denise Ritz & Robert Leming
Nick Roberto
George & Jane Ronan
Rostan Family Foundation
Tom & Leslie Ruckdeschel
TR & Anna Russ
Barbara & Steven Russell
Randy & Mary Charlotte Safford
Steve & Cheri Sawyer
Steven Shaber
Calvin Sossoman
Glenn & Joann Tanzer
Michael Thomas
Unifour Foundation
USDA Forest Service Community
Forest Program
Doug & Gwen Veazey
Linda Wall
Martha & Chip Whitfield
William & Shirley Winston

Our Virtual Big Backyard

Summer Camp in a Box

In a typical summer, certain Foothills Conservancy staff transform from development professionals and volunteer coordinators into summer camp leaders with all of the accoutrements: belt loops holstering walkie-talkies, name tags dangling on every available arm, and Band-Aids and bug spray poised and ready.

Usually that week of camp is spent exploring the forest, swimming in Lake James, wading through creeks, and showing children creative ways to appreciate their environment by immersing them in nature. These adventures focus on environmental education and STEAM learning, with about 50 children from our eight-county service region participating. The third year of Our Big Backyard looked a little different, but the conservancy, ever resilient, was determined to provide an engaging and impactful summer camp experience, even in the midst of a global pandemic.

At first, conservancy staff weren't entirely sure what camp would look like, but "skipping a year wasn't an option for us," said Associate Director Beth Willard-Patton. "It was important for us to provide some type of summer camp experience, and I am so proud of what we produced."

Providing a high-quality camp experience meant dedicating plenty of time to planning, preparing, and making the ultimate decision to convert our in-person camp to a virtual, kit-based, learning experience. Staff and volunteers spent most of spring and early summer designing lesson plans, recording interactive videos, and creating colorful and engaging infographics.

This year, Foothills Conservancy provided materials for a full four weeks of environmental education and STEAM learning to 60 children through weekly kits, packed in



boxes donated by Packaging Corporation of America. Kits were handed out in downtown Morganton at the conservancy's office parking lot every Monday in July, and the contents of each box reflected an elemental theme: earth, wind/air, sun/heat, and water.

With help from N.C. Cooperative Extension Burke County Center and the Morganton-based arts advocacy group TOSS, lesson plans included activities that encourage environmental awareness, healthy eating, exercise and art. Children learned through interactive, self-led activities like breaking open a geode, dissecting owl pellets, making sun prints from items collected in nature, creating a human sundial and so much more! After campers completed a project, they uploaded the results from their personal experience to Moodle, an online learning platform. Camp leaders interacted with students through this virtual platform, allowing connections to be made with children even without in-person interactions.

"It was hard not to be hands-on this year with campers as we have in the past," said Development Coordinator Sophie Elliott. "As photo submissions started to come in, we appreciated the various reactions campers had to each activity and the progress they were making from week to week."

Parents and campers alike loved picking up and opening their weekly kits, treating each week's box as a birthday-style surprise. "Listening to the kids try to guess the weekly theme was really rewarding," Willard-Patton said. "I was surprised at how quickly they figured it out, and it made me happy to see them so engaged in this way."

Visit foothillsconservancy.org/obb for videos of camp activities. 🦋



PERSPECTIVE & IMAGE in the Outdoors

Chris Grant with his three children

By Guest Contributor Chris Grant, WNC Realty Agent

“Because of who I am, a black man, people in and out of this space often signal to me that the outdoors aren’t for me. I know despite what I’m able to physically accomplish in these spaces, I cannot always claim them as my own. Any discomfort that I experience in these areas is affirmed when I don’t see anyone else who looks like me in the outdoor ads and magazines. So I’d like to solicit some support. Not everyone has to carry this weight. Those who don’t have to carry racial stigma into their outdoor experience are privileged. Those who feel like they own the space around them are privileged. Anyone who has access to the outdoors is privileged.” — Steffen Jean-Pierre

I came across this quote as I was scrolling The North Face’s Instagram page. I had to go back and read it several times, as it so pointedly clarified my feelings as a black man who enjoys and frequents the outdoors. The murder of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who died in police custody, has brought a closer look into the treatment of black people in today’s America. While this Article isn’t the place to pontificate on that matter, I do believe it has caused a number of companies to take a closer look at what they’re doing to help address the issue, and what representation means to them. On a much broader scale, I think it’s important for us as individuals to look introspectively and ask what we’re doing to be more inclusive overall, but in this context, I applaud The North Face for taking a tactful approach to bring light to the perspectives had by people of color with the experience in the outdoors.

As a child my interests would usually align with something that involved the outdoors, and wasn’t traditionally the “black thing to do,” as was pointed out repeatedly by both black and white people. I didn’t grasp why there had to be a line drawn based on race that kept me relegated to an outsider in something I cherished, until I got older and realized the power of the media. If representation matters, perception is everything, and I realized early on that the reason I was an outsider was due in part to the lack of representation in ad spaces and a broader spectrum of sports and activities, which plays into this perverted notion that black people somehow aren’t suited to a particular sport or activity based solely on skin color or culture.

I find myself incredibly fortunate to have the Linville Gorge, Wilson Creek, and Pisgah National Forest all within 30 minutes of my door, and I feel at home hiking, camping or simply sitting on a rock alone with my thoughts.

According to an article from Harvard Health Publishing at Harvard Medical School, “In a 2015 study, researchers compared the brain activity of healthy people after they walked for 90 minutes in either a natural setting or an urban one. They found that those who did a nature walk had lower activity in the prefrontal cortex, a brain region that is active during rumination — defined as repetitive thoughts that focus on negative emotions.”

Given this insight, it seems fitting to try to create an atmosphere in which people of all colors, shapes and backgrounds feel welcome, as it ranks high on the list of the most cost-effective ways in which people can improve their mental health. In a year filled with uncertainty, unfamiliarity and anxiety, be sure to take care of yourself, and ask how you can make the outdoors a more welcoming place, even if only to lend an ear to someone.



Camping on Lake James



Meet Toni Freeman

In 2020 and 2021, Toni will lead Foothills Conservancy’s staff and board of directors through an organizational assessment and learning sessions that will help the conservancy prioritize and incorporate diversity, inclusion, equity and justice into its mission and everyday practice.

Toni Freeman has more than 20 years of experience in executive management and as a consultant working with nonprofits. She recently completed a yearlong training program with the Leadership Development Initiative for building inclusion, equity and trust in organizations.

Foothills Conservancy is committed to diversifying the land conservation movement and bringing about more impactful, lasting environmental change by including more people in its work who reflect the diversity of the communities the land trust serves.



On a warm October day in 1984, Vince Schneider waded through the Jacob Fork River in South Mountains State Park — his attention captured by a bright red hue darting across the riverbed. Intrigued, Schneider, a curator of paleontology at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, caught up with the clawed creature and plucked it from the water, observing its brilliant blue tailfin fringed with vibrant red.

It was unlike any other crayfish known to inhabit the region at that time — and this particular specimen was not alone, joined in the water by other pops of color sifting through the stones and silt at Schneider's feet.

Schneider jarred the specimen and brought it back to his colleague, the late John Cooper, a research curator of crustaceans at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences.

"That was just their standard protocol: Capture unique specimens, throw it in a jar and give it to John Cooper," said Michael Perkins, an aquatic wildlife diversity biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "John made notes about this species in his files, and more specimens were collected throughout the '80s, '90s and 2000s" — found only in the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork rivers — "but no one really knew what this crayfish was and how it fit in to the bigger picture in North Carolina."

That is, Perkins said, until the "crayfish nerds" caught on to the discovery — and pushed to solve this decades-long mystery.

"The thing that jumped out to us was the coloration, particularly around the tail or tailfin," Perkins said, adding that he was first introduced to the crayfish in 2017 by N.C. Wildlife colleague William T. Russ.



"There's this blue shade fringed with bright red that's not common in any of the other species that co-occur in these waters — or really in the entire western part of the state."

Of course, he added, there were other things too: The shape of the claws, the number of spines around the hepatic region, patterns of spination and other much more subtle characteristics.

"We collected a couple of these weird things, and it was clear that these were definitely not the usual flavor of species that we find around here," Perkins said.

In February 2019, the new crayfish species received its official name, *Cambarus franklini*, or the South Mountains crayfish, in a scientific article authored by Perkins, Russ and N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences Research Curator Bronwyn Williams. Now, Perkins and his colleagues have begun the process of protecting this rare and hyper-localized species, which lives in two distinct and unconnected populations in the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork rivers.

With the inclusion of *Cambarus franklini*, 46 species of crayfish have been identified in North Carolina. But about a quarter of them — maybe 15-20 species, Perkins estimates — have yet to be described.

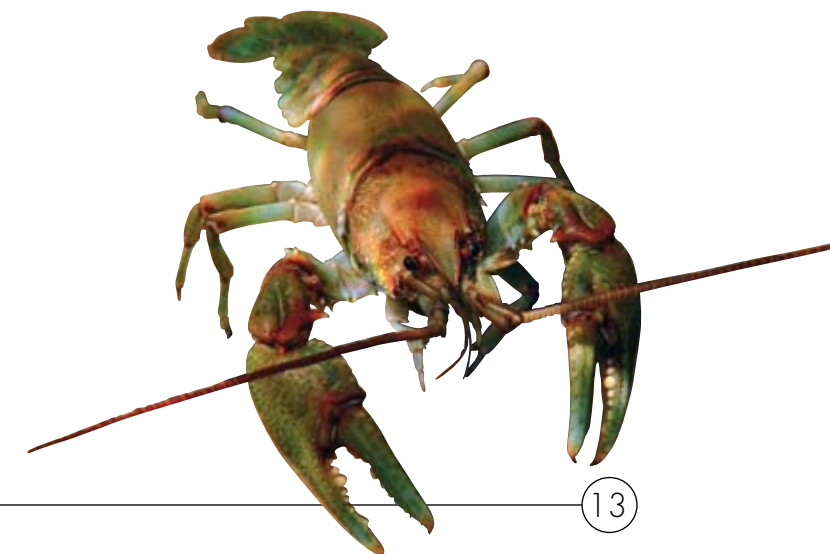
"We're a well-known global aquatic biodiversity hot spot," Perkins explained, referencing in particular an abundance of fish, mussel and crayfish species. "And we're still in the process of figuring out just

how many species there are, because so many are still out there, undescribed.

"That's the really exciting thing," he continued. "We've begun this statewide inventory, basically taking a genetic sample of every specimen. And, as we hone in on all these different species, we'll start to uncover this hidden biodiversity in North Carolina."

Though they may be small and relatively unassuming, crayfish play an important role in the ecosystem — upcycling nutrients, breaking down leaf litter and preventing the buildup of harmful nitrates by burrowing and stirring up sediment. This makes these species' formal discovery and ensuing protection invaluable when looking at aquatic resource conservation as a whole.

"Coming from a conservationist point of view, there's a lot of intrinsic value in biodiversity," Perkins said. "The South Mountains crayfish is something that you can't find anywhere else in the world, and I think that's worth protecting and cherishing." 🦞



PARK IT IN CATAWBA

By Guest Contributor Alicia Wilfong, Association Management of Catawba Valley, LLC Agent



In the near future, many of us in the Hickory area will no longer have to drive an hour or two to play in a scenic state park. This year, despite COVID-19, Foothills Conservancy acquired 303 acres along the Henry Fork River and an additional 110 acres along the Jacob Fork River in Catawba County, adding to last year's 128 acres along the Jacob Fork for a new North Carolina State Park.

The latest acquisition sits at the halfway point between the City of Hickory's Henry Fork River Park — directly off Interstate 40 Exit 121, in the northern part of the county — and the City of Newton's Jacob Fork Park, on N.C. Highway 10, where the Henry Fork and the Jacob Fork rivers join to create the South Fork Catawba River. It is an easy canoe trip, making it attractive to people with a range of experience. This particular part of the Henry Fork River is a comfortable paddle, soon accessible through a canoe launch that will lead to picnic areas and more for those looking to get outside.

The land's plentiful rolling hills are perfect for miles of gorgeous hiking and biking trails. The creeks nestled in the woods may surprise you with hidden waterfalls off the beaten path. Walking across a broad meadow, we were surprised by a pileated woodpecker heading for the trees, followed shortly after by an osprey leaving the river.

This new segment of state park on the Henry Fork River was initiated by the City of Hickory's generous donation of 140 acres. The donation empowered Foothills Conservancy and North Carolina State Parks to work together to complete the acquisition of the additional 303 acres. It is gracious donations like this that makes a state park feasible.

Approved just last year by the N.C. General Assembly, the new Wilderness Gateway State Trail will run through the property as a canoe trail, connecting the Catawba County rivers to South Mountains State Park in Burke County, then on through McDowell and Rutherford counties to Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail and Chimney Rock State Park. Not only will it connect to Valdese and Hickory, it will also overlap the Overmountain Victory State Trail in some places.

Visiting a park is a healthy way to spend the day and can also be healthy for the economy. Immediately off U.S. 321 Exit 41 at River Road, it's not a bad drive, either. Close to many dining and shopping options, an individual could easily spend several hours at the park and then visit one of the area restaurants or breweries located minutes away. This is a perfect destination for anyone interested in getting outdoors, either as a first-time visitor or as a routine go-to option, as it is easily accessible and has a lot to offer for a day trip.

By 2021, N.C. State Parks plans to acquire the properties from Foothills Conservancy — thus, the canvas of what this park may look like when complete is still being painted. One thing is certain: There will be something for everyone, all ages and skill levels. Bring only a desire to enjoy the great outdoors!

Foothills Conservancy's purchase of the 303-acre Henry Fork River property was made possible by support from a private conservationist and a grant from the Beaver Foundation. 🦋

Symbiotic Relationships Don't Only Occur in Nature

By Guest Contributor Paul Thompson, Northern Mountains Land Management Biologist, Land and Water Access Section, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission



The eastern chipmunk has a mutualistic relationship with the oak tree. The tree provides the chipmunk with shelter and protection from predators, and, in return, the chipmunk disperses seeds so that other oak trees may flourish. Both in their size and benefitting roles, these two species

are totally unique from one another, but, nevertheless, their lives are intertwined.

Maybe it's my current role as a biologist that forces me to relate everything around me to the natural world. Thus, when I think of the relationship between N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, my mind instantly drifts back to my grade school biology class, where the term "symbiosis" first entered my lexicon. Most notably found in nature, symbiosis defines the interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both species. Outside of the natural world, it refers to a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups.

The truth is: Land conservancy groups and government agencies, both on the federal and state levels, need one another, much like the chipmunk and the oak tree — well, sort of. Together, these two dissimilar entities work toward common goals that benefit both the natural resources and the people of North Carolina. Throughout the years, WRC and FCNC have developed a great working relationship and partnered together on multiple projects throughout the foothills. The goal for these projects has ranged anywhere from the protection of critical habitats to providing additional public access to lands. The current acreage over which the WRC has custodial privileges would be far fewer had it not been for the efforts of FCNC and its supporters.

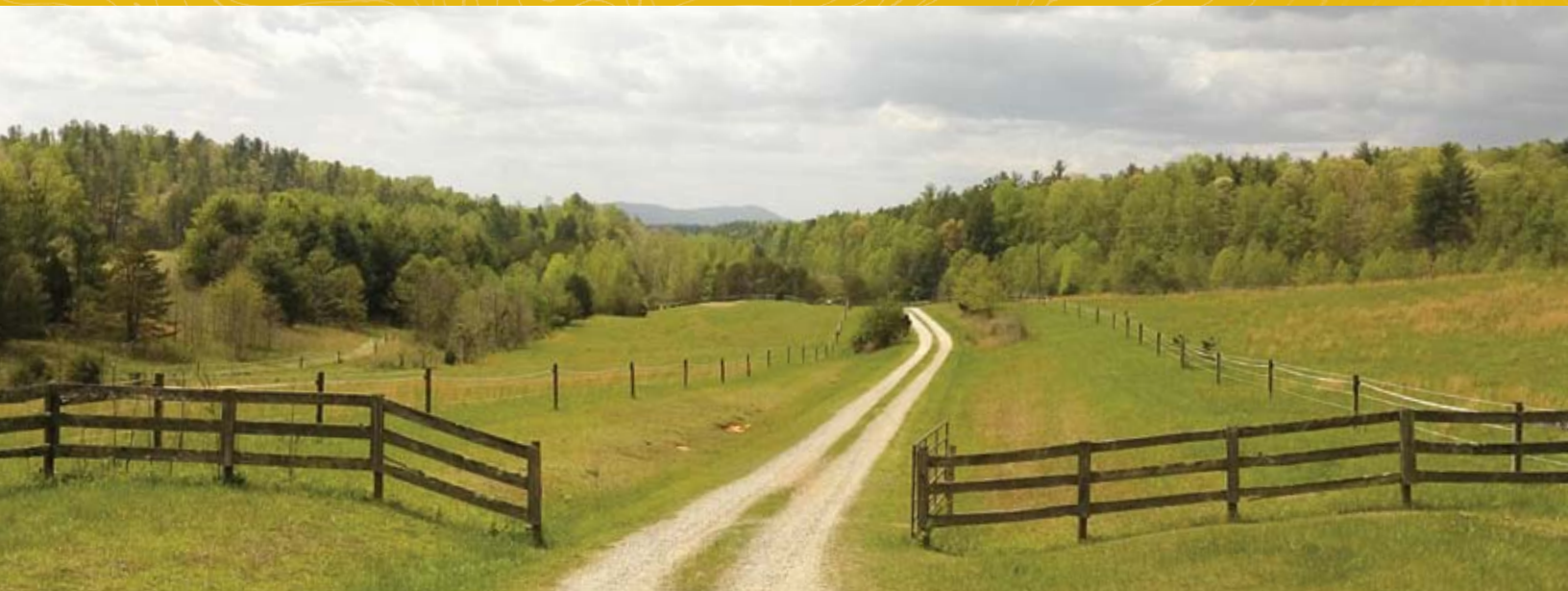
So what makes this partnership so valuable? There are several reasons why the WRC greatly values its partnership with FCNC, and one of them is timing. Like most federal and state agencies, our process to allocate funding and close the deal on a land acquisition is akin to a rattlesnake — it can be very lengthy and most folks would rather avoid it if they could. Some properties have an immediate threat of disposal, and this is where a land conservancy partner comes into play. FCNC has the flexibility to move quickly on a tract of land and protect it until a final acquisition plan is developed. Time and time again, this role has proven successful in protecting lands from imminent development that would otherwise be lost if left in the grips of WRC's timeframe.

Because land protection is the primary focus for our land conservancy partners, they have the time, staff and funding solely dedicated to this goal. Like stitching a quilt, they're able to bring all the pieces together to keep a project moving, especially when dealing with larger parcels that have multiple partners and funding sources. Another advantage of having FCNC as a conservation partner is their intimate knowledge of what's going on in and around their focal area, where they serve as the "eyes and ears," so to speak. Staff that work on land acquisitions within our agency are limited, cover the entire state, and have other duties outside land protection — so relying on our partners is a key component to our land acquisition program. Due to FCNC's dedication, knowledge and commitment to protecting North Carolina's natural resources, thousands of acres have been conserved and are now managed by the WRC.

Whether the WRC is the oak tree or the chipmunk is up for debate. What's not, however, is the value that FCNC adds to an already mutually beneficial relationship with a shared goal in land conservation. 🦋

SUCCESSION PROTECTION: A Farmer's Guide to Land Conservation

By Sophie Elliott, Development Coordinator, Foothills Conservancy



What if soil could talk? What if we could count the furrows in the mud, compacted over hundreds of years by work boots and hooves, like reading rings on a tree? What if we could translate the whispers between blades of grass into stories that reveal a lifetime of memories? What if, between the tread of a tractor's tire, was a collection of artifacts that could solve mysteries from generations before?

Western North Carolina is rich with farmland, pastures and forests. Working lands are often ripe with fascinating histories — and, although soil can't talk, those who work the soil can.

Agriculture is North Carolina's number one industry, accounting for about one-sixth of the state's economy and employees. Foothills Conservancy's land protection staff have visited many farms throughout the past few decades — including ones that have experienced more than 150 years of family triumphs and hardship.

In Burke County, the Misty Meadows Farm and Forest has been a long-time sanctuary for the Sitts

family and their horses. Assembled through multiple purchases over many years, the green and brown speckled landscape is a stunning example of why this region pulls on the heartstrings of so many. But, beyond its scenery, there is something that makes Misty Meadows Farm and Forest even more special — its longevity. The farm is permanently protected with a conservation easement.

Why would someone consider a conservation easement for their land?

The short answer is for peace of mind — to be at ease. Landowners who willingly protect their land through a conservation easement can rest assured that it is protected not only in their own lifetimes, but also long after they're gone. Conservation easements are ideal for families who intend to pass their land on through generations. For the Sitts family, it was imperative that they do what they could to protect their land now so that it remains the way they intended when they are gone.

Another benefit of this form of conservation comes in the form of tax incentives. A landowner that donates

part or all of the conservation easement value may claim that value as a deduction for income purposes.

Certain factors determine whether a conservation easement is a viable option for a piece of land. Protection with an easement, as well as the ability for the donor to use tax deductions, depends on the property's conservation values and public benefits: natural habitat protection for both wildlife and plants, preservation of open space or scenic views, watershed conservation, agricultural land protection, or preservation of historically important land.

Once a landowner makes the choice to sell or donate a conservation easement, they enter into a voluntary agreement with Foothills Conservancy that restricts certain activities on the property, all meant to preserve the integrity of the land and its natural and agricultural resource values. For example, the Sitts family will continue to manage the land for agricultural production and passive recreation, but the right to subdivide the farm into smaller parcels no longer exists. From there, the conservancy accepts a perpetual responsibility to inspect the property annually, steward the conservation easement, and

partner with the landowner on the continued protection of the land.

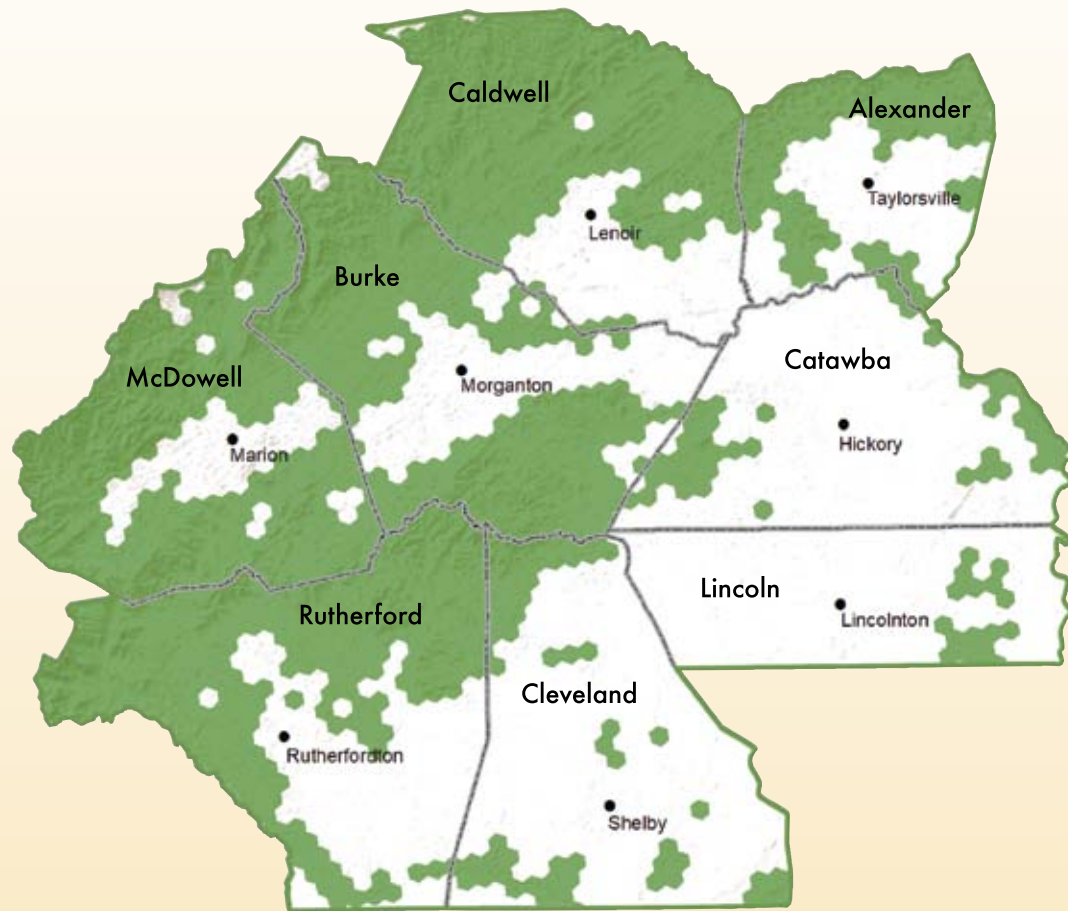
Together with private landowners, Foothills Conservancy has permanently protected 28 properties — totalling 4,200 acres — through conservation easements in its service area. 🦅

What is NCADFP?

The Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFP) provides grant funding for agricultural conservation easements to protect North Carolina's farmland and heritage. The fund was passed by the General Assembly in 2005 as a support for the agricultural industry. The ADFP has awarded Foothills Conservancy seven grants since 1999 to protect 1,992 acres of privately owned farmland, including the Misty Meadows Farm and Forest project.

CREATING CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

By Beth Willard-Patton, Associate Director, Foothills Conservancy



Climate Resilient Landscapes in Foothills Service Area

Lush, green forests. Cool, clean water. Stunning vistas. Plentiful wildlife and rare fauna. Western North Carolina is the ultimate natural playground, but our swaths of natural landscapes serve an even bigger global purpose.

Over the past 25 years, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina has protected more than 60,000 acres of land across western North Carolina, and the preservation of this biodiverse landscape goes beyond creating a place to escape into nature: It can also help limit the effects of climate change.

Land trusts like Foothills Conservancy play a significant role in mitigating the effects of climate change by creating climate solutions — actionable efforts that offset the negative impacts of climate

change, like protecting land in floodplains that shield neighboring properties from floodwaters or buffer sea level rise. Native plants and animals, especially in the Blue Ridge Mountains, are adapting to climate change as they move along protected corridors to escape to higher, cooler ground. Ensuring that these corridors exist as “green highways” for both plant and animal species is yet another feasible climate solution.

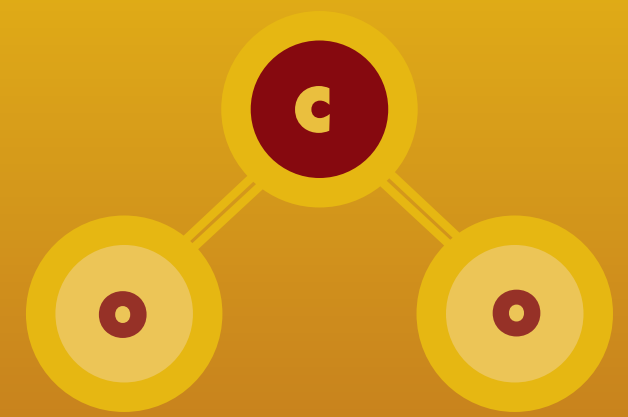
Trees also play a critical role in climate change mitigation by capturing and storing large amounts of carbon that would otherwise leak into the atmosphere. Forest enhancement activities, such as the planting of 3,500 native shortleaf pines trees at our Oak Hill Community Park and Forest this spring, is a localized example of how Foothills Conservancy’s

forestry best management practices contribute to climate solutions. By early 2021, reforestation efforts led by the conservancy’s stewardship director, Ryan Sparks, will result in 60,000 shortleaf pine seedlings on the Oak Hill Park Community Park and Forest property and on conservancy lands in the South Mountains.

Protecting natural strongholds, or places where the effects of climate change are buffered by the natural properties of a site, is yet another viable climate change solution put forth by the conservancy. These natural strongholds, often referred to as “resilient landscapes,” may include varied topography and complex geology, connected natural cover, high quality biodiversity, or a combination of these and other features. Even as the climate changes, resilient landscapes like these retain high quality habitats and support diverse arrays of plant and animal species. In 2016, The Nature Conservancy announced its Resilient and Connected Landscapes project, a first-of-its-kind study that brought 60 scientists together to focus on identifying such areas for potential protection. Over an eight-year period, these scientists studied and comprehensively mapped resilient land corridors across North America.

Foothills Conservancy’s eight-county service area is full of resilient sites, particularly in the South Mountains, Blue Ridge Mountains and Brushy Mountains. This new data not only assists the conservancy in evaluating land, but also affirms that many of the conservancy’s past and present focus areas are refuges for biodiversity as the climate changes.

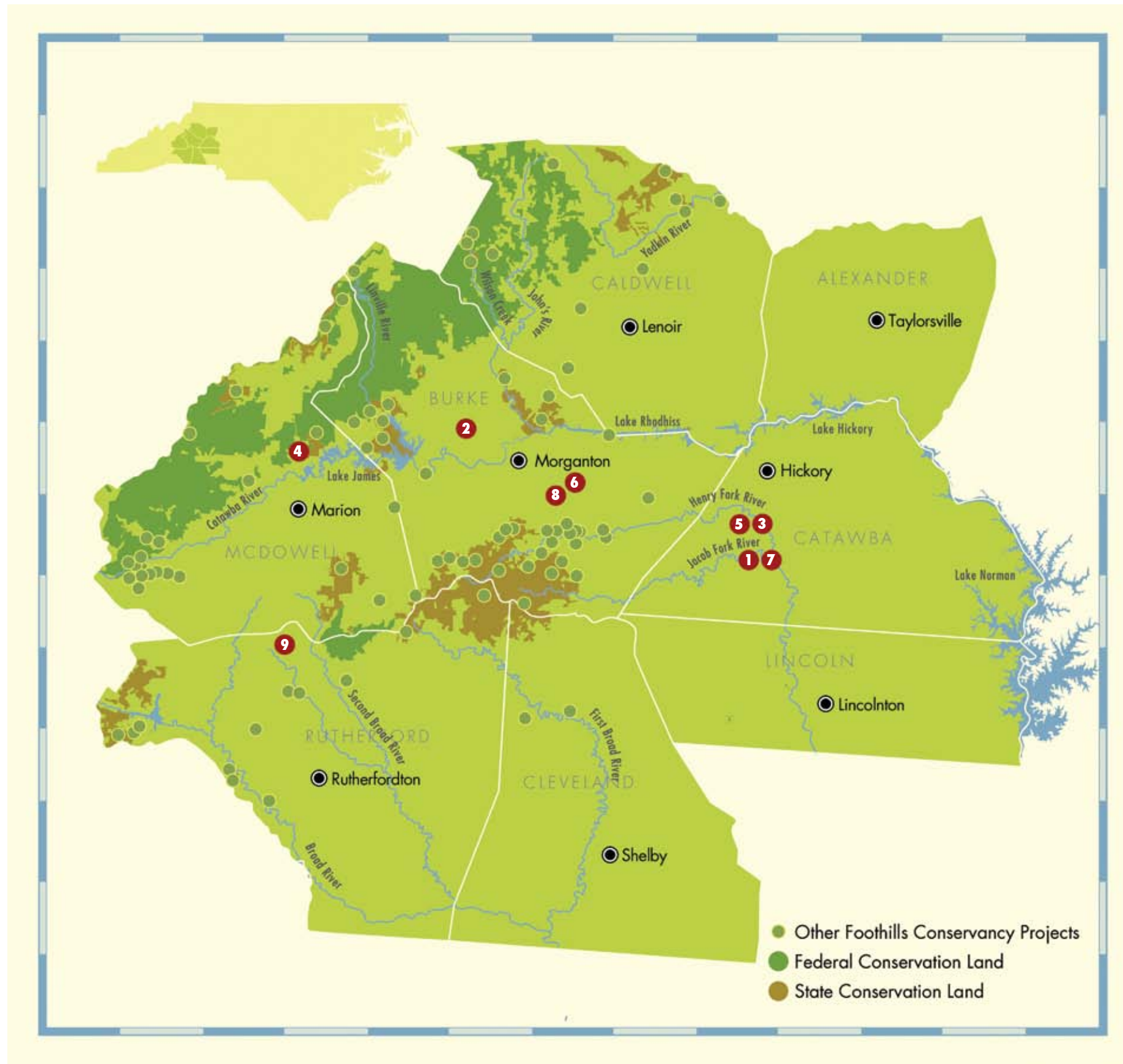
As leaders in the conservation industry, land trusts are uniquely positioned to prioritize and act on the permanent protection of resilient sites to provide habitat for native species. By securing these places, land trusts are also safeguarding natural resources like fresh drinking water, clean air and even recreation benefits for communities both now and into the future. Foothills Conservancy is committed to continuing our strategic conservation work to protect aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat, working farms, healthy forests, creeks, rivers, streams and resilient landscapes for the benefit of our enjoyment and our climate. 🦋



Carbon dioxide is necessary to sustain life on Earth, creating an insulating layer around the planet that traps heat and energy from the sun. But it’s a delicate balance. For the last few decades, an increase in atmospheric carbon has begun warming the planet over a very short period, and the effects are being felt in the form of devastating extreme weather. These new, frequently recurring weather events, such as flooding and drought, negatively affect humans and wildlife alike through displaced communities, loss of habitat, food insecurity and more.

2020 Foothills Footprint

- 1 Jacob Fork River Finger Bridge**
Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy for transfer to N.C. State Parks as part of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.
- 2 Oak Hill Community Park and Forest**
Acquisition of a community park and forest property for future public recreation. Project ensures permanent protection of undeveloped forest, agricultural land, and riparian buffers in the Canoe Creek watershed.
- 3 Henry Fork Wilderness Gateway State Trail/Parklands**
Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy for transfer to N.C. State Parks to assemble a large nature-oriented park. The park is made possible by a 2019 state law establishing the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.
- 4 North Fork Catawba River**
Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy for transfer to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission for future public use and river access as part of its Wildlife Conservation Area program.
- 5 City of Hickory donation /Wilderness Gateway State Trail/Parklands**
Donation of land on Henry Fork to N.C. State Parks for future nature-oriented park that adjoins 303 acres acquired by Foothills Conservancy.



- 6 Mineral Springs Mountain/Flat Gap Mountain**
Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy to expand conservation land on Mineral Springs Mountain and develop a future segment of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail
- 7 Jacob Fork River Finger Bridge 2**
Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy for transfer to N.C. State Parks as part of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.
- 8 Laurel Creek Wilderness Gateway State Trail**
Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy to connect to existing conservation preserve lands, and future management as part of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.
- 9 Catheys Creek Donation**
Land donation to Foothills Conservancy to protect undeveloped forest and the headwaters of Catheys Creek.



**FOOTHILLS
CONSERVANCY**
OF NORTH CAROLINA



JUST ADD WATER

Jonas Ridge Cranberry Bog

Fresh dew sparkles in the early morning sunshine, bejeweling webs woven overnight between tangled limb and bough. The air is cool and heavy with fog; the ground soft and damp, undulating with spongy moss. Cricket and bird chirps are occasionally interrupted by the whoosh of a passing car. As the sun rises in the sky, it begins to illuminate a wild and wonderful scene of natural beauty that is the Jonas Ridge Cranberry Bog, a unique and important wetland that Foothills Conservancy has been working to protect through their network of partnerships.



By Guest Contributor
Owen Carson,
Senior Ecologist,
Equinox Environmental

Tucked away in the small mountain community of Jonas Ridge and nestled between two well-used roadways, the bog stands as a reminder of the resilience of our natural ecosystems amidst an ever-changing and developing world. Now, thanks to the efforts of the conservancy, the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund (now the North Carolina Land and Water Fund), Burke County, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Equinox Environmental, and funding support from a private conservationist, the North Carolina Native Plant Society and The Clabough Foundation, the imperiled wetland and the biome it supports will receive permanent protection under a conservation easement.

Mountain bogs are exceptionally rare natural communities, both regionally and globally. Relics of the Pleistocene age, they support a suite of plants and animals with ancient lineages that find their niche in the saturated, mucky environment: Peat moss, pitcher plants, bog turtles, orchids, and other rare organisms abound in mountain bogs. And although pitcher plants and bog turtles aren't found at the Jonas Ridge site (yet), it does host wild populations of cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), which are listed as Threatened in North Carolina and are uncommon in bogs this far south.

They form dense mats in sunny areas of the bog that aren't regularly underwater, and their miniscule, buzz-pollinated flowers mature into the same old cranberries that you're used to seeing in stores at Thanksgiving. If you get down close enough, you'll also notice sprawling patches of carnivorous sundews, which trap and digest flies and other small insects using sap-coated appendages.



Flowering Bog Cranberry

And plants aren't the only special species to occur at the Jonas Ridge Bog; the early hairstreak butterfly (*Erora laeta*), listed as Significantly Rare in the state, spends its sunny summer mornings in the wetland too. There is a unique relationship between the butterfly and steeplebush (*Spiraea tomentosa*), which is ubiquitous on-site. The insect chooses to nectar almost exclusively on the shrub's flowers, retreating to drier woodlands to lay its eggs on the fruits of beech and hazelnut. The bog also supports rare species of darners and dragonflies, which find excellent foraging habitat in the bog's moist, open grounds and scattered, deep pools, as well as in the adjacent grass and wildflower meadow. Furthermore, native brook trout thrive in adjacent Joe Branch, a tributary of Upper Creek, signifying the important filtration function the bog serves in maintaining the stream's clarity and integrity.

Sadly, most of the region's mountain bogs have been permanently destroyed via ditching, draining, and conversion to dry land as part of historic, landscape-scale agricultural and property development. Some might call it "progress," but advancement should never lead to the irreversible destruction of niche habitats.

JONAS RIDGE CRANBERRY BOG



The remaining few mountain bogs are of paramount conservation concern, and as such, are placed in sharp focus by the conservation community. In fact, in 2015 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge, which, in partnership with land trusts, local and state agencies, and biologists, seeks to protect, understand, and promote the conservation of montane bogs.

All of this underlines the importance of the partnerships behind this collaborative project. Working across jurisdictional and regulatory lines, public, private, and nonprofit interests alike have advocated for the resources they individually represent, which in turn has yielded a powerful collective force for permanent conservation. Critical funding was also provided by the Alice Zawadzki Land Conservation Fund of the North Carolina Native Plant Society, which helped Foothills Conservancy underwrite a summer intern, Anna Willis, to assist with documenting onsite conditions and drafting a baseline documentation report in support of the CWMTF easement. Once it's fully protected, the land containing the bog will be donated to Burke County, which is working with Equinox to develop a plan for community education and interpretation at the bog. The hard work and dedication of the partners proves that when we work together, we build capacity to affect greater change in the world and protect its remaining natural wonders. 🦋



Forever Our Friend: In Remembrance of Janet Wilson

This spring, Foothills Conservancy lost a remarkable friend with a soul for conservation and servitude: Janet Hostetter Wilson.

Former Foothills Conservancy Executive Director Susie Hamrick Jones grew quiet and thoughtful as she chronicled their friendship, calling Janet "classy, humble, and a role model for all people."

"She was an advocate for women and always guided by rock-solid principles, whether it be education or conservation," Susie said.



Susan Powers, a conservancy board member, lived in the same community as Janet for almost 40 years, and, although their friendship developed later in life through a shared interest in the environment, Susan credits Janet with giving her one of the best gifts she could have asked for: an introduction to Foothills Conservancy.

"She was a gracious, loving, giving person that cared so much about environmental issues," said Susan, reflecting on the years they spent testing water quality in Wilson Creek and driving the

gravel roads through Mortimer and Edgemont. "I valued her friendship dearly."

Foothills Conservancy's Executive Director Andrew Kota fondly remembers Janet as "a kind soul and a friend."

"I was working on a Wilson Creek conservation plan for Foothills when I first met Janet, and I had the opportunity to accompany her at community and public meetings," he said. "I watched how she treated everyone with respect and kindness and was astounded by her determination to protect the environment. Even though I was relatively 'green' to the land trust world, being associated with her instilled confidence in me. We developed a friendship during that time and through her service on the conservancy's board (and after). It is obvious to me that I am in my position today because of her support, trust, and confidence."

Susie added: "Janet was a professional who brought a keen understanding of the business of the conservancy to her volunteer service. She wanted Foothills to last and to be on firm-footing so that our conservation work will go on."

Foothills Conservancy is fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience Janet's passion for the environment, philanthropic spirit, and warm nature. Our hearts are with Janet's three children, six grandchildren, and her countless friends. Her conservation spirit, volunteerism, and humble leadership are missed today and will continue to be missed forever. 🦋

Due to her passionate work protecting the area's natural spaces, many often assume that Wilson Creek, a National Wild and Scenic River, is attributed to Janet's family name. While the river was not named for Janet or her family, she did spend many years diligently protecting its waters. Living in Lenoir for most of her life, Wilson Creek was one of Janet's favorite places in Western North Carolina. She spearheaded the conservation of a 650-acre parcel of land, the Lutz Tract, in Caldwell County that contains more than four miles of river frontage along the creek. In 2007, the tract was under immediate threat of development until Janet stepped in.

Ron Beane, Janet's friend and former Caldwell County Commissioner, North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund trustee and Foothills Conservancy board chair, explained that Janet stalled the Lutz property deal to "Save Wilson Creek."

"Janet and her family helped fund worthwhile projects that helped other people, and Janet was the driving force in funding these projects — mostly through anonymous gifts," Ron explained. "The family never wanted to be recognized for giving; they just wanted to help their community. And Wilson Creek wouldn't look the way it does today without Janet quietly stepping in."

After the conservation success at Wilson Creek, Susie recruited Janet to serve on Foothills Conservancy's Board of Directors in 2008. Janet brought energy, enthusiasm, and grace during her two consecutive terms of service.

Building a Conservation Army



CONSERVATION AMBASSADOR
FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY OF NORTH CAROLINA

Sustainability can refer to many things: a lifestyle, energy, diet or sourcing of materials. In its new Conservation Ambassador program, Foothills Conservancy combines sustainability with one thing on which every nonprofit depends: funding.

A sustaining gifts initiative, the Conservancy Ambassador program launched in early 2020 and offers donors an opportunity to commit to an annual gift over a three-year period.

The program includes two tiers of support — \$1,000-\$2,499 or \$2,500 and above — and donors can choose how they wish to make their annual gift. For example, one individual may pay a lump sum of \$1,000 each year for three years, and another may make bi-annual gifts of \$500 for three years.

This year in particular, Foothills Conservancy recognizes that a stable and reliable stream of unrestricted income is essential to supporting our operations and advancing our conservation mission. We are wholeheartedly grateful for those donors who have already signed a commitment to participate in the Conservation Ambassador program.

Join the Conservation Ambassador program today!
Visit foothillsconservancy.org/conservationambassador
or email **Beth Willard-Patton** at bwillardpatton@foothillsconservancy.org.

Feedback Appreciated

The bright green accreditation seal on our website, marketing materials and letters is a sign of distinction among land trusts. As an accredited land trust, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina upholds the highest standards for land conservation. The accreditation process certifies that the conservancy is dedicated to its supporters by adhering to a set of national quality standards, which were put in place to ensure thorough and ethical protection of our natural, open spaces.

Foothills Conservancy first earned national accreditation in 2010, renewed in 2016, and is preparing for its second renewal in 2021. As part of the renewal, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission thoroughly reviews the conservancy's policies and programs. The Commission then invites the public to write comments on the ways in which Foothills Conservancy observes the standards set forth by the accreditation process. To see a full list of standards, visit landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices.

According to Rand Wentworth, president emeritus of the Land Trust Alliance, "Accreditation is the single most important step the land

trust community has taken in the last decade to advance the quality of land trust operations and secure the public's trust."

Foothills Executive Director Andrew Kota added: "Foothills Conservancy is proud to be a part of the distinguished group of accredited land trusts. It is a signal to our partners and the public that we are a reliable and principled land trust that is prepared for the permanence of land conservation because of our strong governance, sound finances, and reputable transactional processes."

To learn more or to submit a comment of support for Foothills, visit landtrustaccreditation.org or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, with the recipient name "Attn: Public Comments:" to (fax) 518-587-3183 or (mail) 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, New York 12866.

Comments on Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina's application will be most useful by June 30, 2021.



2020 Guardians of the Land

Foothills Conservancy's Guardians of the Land are landowners who choose to protect their properties either by donating conservation easements — in full or in part — or by donating their land outright to permanently preserve the places they cherish. We are pleased to recognize David and Martha Cameron as our newest Guardians of the Land.

David & Martha Cameron Catheys Creek, 235 acres

David and Martha Cameron have always been interested in the protection of our natural resources. An exhibits specialist for KidSenses Children's Interactive Museum and a massage therapist, respectively, David and Martha both are passionate about making a positive impact on their fellow community members' lives. In 2019, the couple approached the conservancy in search of conservation options for their family property in Rutherford County — and, in August 2020, they made the decision official, generously donating a 235-acre tract of scenic, undeveloped, forested land to the conservancy.

This donation ensures the protection of hundreds of acres of forested land that is home to diverse wildlife, rare plants, unique natural features, and a portion of Catheys Creek.

The remaining land (approximately 87 acres) includes two homeplaces — a historic home built before the Civil War, where Martha's son, Rob Messick, resides, and a second that David and Martha built as their permanent "treehouse" in the woods.

This land, along with its home sites, has been bequeathed to the conservancy as part of David and Martha's estate plan. It is their dream and intention for their property to become a public park, providing education, recreation, and enjoyment for all who live in and visit Rutherford County. This remarkable planned gift also places the Camerons on the conservancy's treasured list of Pinnacle Society members. (See Pinnacle Society, page 39.)



Martha Cameron



David Cameron



Rob Messick

A SUMMER OF STUDENTS

This summer, Foothills Conservancy's staff reached double digits as it welcomed three new interns to its team. Working alongside conservancy staff, these hard-working individuals provided new perspectives while also completing important and varied project tasks, learning the basics of land trust operations and developing skills in the field of natural resource conservation.

Although summer is long behind us, we have a good feeling (and certainly hope!) that we haven't seen the last of these three.

Foothills Conservancy occasionally offers internships when funding is available. In the coming years, the conservancy hopes to develop a formal program for these temporary paid opportunities that contributes to the development of the next generation of conservation professionals. The conservancy encourages contacts from individuals who wish to learn more about land trusts and resource conservation through a short-term internship, and welcomes input and contributions from donors interested in supporting an internship position.



Anna Willis

The first to join the ranks was Anna Willis, whose summer work was funded by a grant to Foothills Conservancy from Conservation Trust for North Carolina's Diversity in Conservation Internship Program (DCIP). The DCIP engages college students and graduates of color in the conservation field. The 10-week paid program has placed more than 100 people of color in conservation-related internships since 2008.

Originally from Lenoir, Anna graduated from Western Carolina University in May 2019, earning a bachelor's degree in geology with a concentration in hydrology.

Assisting Land Protection Director Tom Kenney, Anna helped complete baseline documentation reports and management summaries for several conservation properties, including the Jonas Ridge Bog conservation easement and the Oak Hill Community Park and Forest acquisition. These reports are essential components of each permanent conservation project and are requirements for national land trust accreditation.

After completing her internship, Anna accepted a position with the Town of Boone as a wastewater treatment plant lab technician. In this job, she will be responsible for coordinating the Grease Prevention Program and assisting the lab supervisor/pretreatment coordinator in conducting chemical and bacteriological tests and performing pretreatment-related field responsibilities.



Alisa Andrews

Next, Foothills welcomed Alisa Andrews, a sophomore at North Carolina State University who is double-majoring in agricultural science and science, technology, and society studies through the university's Thomas Jefferson Scholar program. Her internship at Foothills Conservancy was supported by NCSU's highly selective Caldwell Fellows program, which challenges students to interact collaboratively with community partners. This led Alisa to inquire about an internship position to learn more about the conservancy's stewardship and conservation efforts.

During her 10-week internship, Alisa worked closely with Special Projects Coordinator Brittany Watkins to prepare a community garden and urban agriculture program feasibility report for the Oak Hill Community Park and Forest property. Her work on this report will help the land trust develop a community agriculture program next year.

Having grown up near Lake James, an area where Foothills Conservancy has helped protect thousands of acres of land, Alisa felt drawn to the work of the conservancy, as she spent many years exploring and appreciating Morganton's natural areas.



Trace Cook

As the third and final addition to the summer team, Trace Cook joined the conservancy as its first summer stewardship intern, assisting Stewardship Director Ryan Sparks with conservation property inspections and various land management activities. Annual land inspections are a permanent responsibility that Foothills Conservancy accepts with each conservation easement and fee-property it holds. Throughout the summer, Trace installed gates and fences to protect property access, installed erosion control devices to help protect water quality, and learned about conservation best management practices while helping Ryan with management activities on Foothills Conservancy's preserve properties. He also played an important role assisting with the documentation of current natural conditions in the Oak Hill Community Park and Forest property, spending many hours walking the property's boundary lines and interior trails and forests.

Also from Lenoir, Trace currently attends Western Carolina University in pursuit of a natural resource management degree, with a concentration in forest management. He is passionate about conservation and cares deeply about having well-managed lands for generations of people and wildlife to enjoy.

Beth Heile 2020 Ruby Award



Named for late biologist, educator and founding conservancy board member Ruby Pharr, the Ruby Award is Foothills Conservancy's highest honor for conservation volunteer service. This year, Foothills Conservancy is honored to announce Beth Heile as the 2020 Ruby Award recipient.

In every small town, there are names that, when brought up, generate a smile accompanied by a familiar, "I know them!" These people leave footprints wherever they go and inspire others with their infectious enthusiasm and passion. Beth Heile is one of these people.

In 2015, Beth approached Foothills Conservancy for assistance with the purchase of a 300-acre tract of land in Valdese for a new public park. From that moment, Beth has said that the conservancy "took her under its wings." If that's true, though, then she has certainly finagled the mechanics of those wings and taken flight herself.

Valdese Lakeside Park has been Beth's passion for many years, and she currently serves as president of the Friends of the Valdese Rec, a volunteer position. Not only did she spearhead the networking and fundraising needed to purchase the land, she has pushed forward all efforts to develop park amenities and trails throughout the scenic tract on Lake Rhodhiss. Since its official ribbon cutting in mid-2018, Beth and her team have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the now-popular site, including funds for a footbridge to connect the park to the popular McGalliard Falls. She has also spread her passion for nature to children

and others in the community — forming the Conservation Kids book club for children age 3-11 to learn more about the natural environment within the park; organizing group walks and community picnics; hosting an Eagle Scout project; leading lake and shoreside clean-ups, and other such ventures. Following in his mother's footsteps, Beth's son, Zakk, chartered the Trail Blazers Club, a group of high school students who help build sustainable trails for hikers and walkers in the park.

Envisioning the Energizer Bunny yet?

Beth also volunteers her time as a board member for the Friends of the Fonta Flora State Trail and is a founding member of the Catawba River Wildlife Coalition, a new chapter with the N.C. Wildlife Federation focusing on the Catawba River in Burke and Caldwell counties. In fall 2018, she was appointed to the N.C. Parks and Recreation Authority by the governor and earned the Wildlife Volunteer of the Year Award. Beth also serves on the Lakes Advisory Committee for the North Carolina Habitat Enhancement Program, an initiative by Duke Energy to provide private recreational access while maintaining habitat protection in and around the Catawba-Wateree River.

"Beth is a tireless advocate for conservation and open space for public recreation," says Foothills Conservancy Executive Director Andrew Kota. "We first partnered with Beth and the Friends of Valdese Rec several years ago during the effort to acquire Valdese Lakeside Park. Since that time, Beth has made a name for herself in the North Carolina conservation community due to her passion for land preservation and public trails and her time spent volunteering hundreds of hours each year to ensure citizens of this region have greenspaces and parks where they can play outside and enjoy nature. Through this work, she is part of Foothills Conservancy's legacy of conservation, and I am proud to present her with this year's Ruby Award."

Beth Heile has dedicated considerable amounts of time and energy to conservation in Western North Carolina in the few short years that the conservancy has had the pleasure of calling her a friend. She is truly a conservation champion and the ultimate volunteer! 🦋



The Upside of Getting Outside

By Guest Contributor Seth Hawkins, M.D.



Significant evidence supports the health benefits of nature, from journalist and author Richard Louv's original writing on "nature-deficit disorder" in 2005 to physician Eva Selhub and bio-philosopher Alan C. Logan's "Your Brain on Nature" in 2014 — and a host of publications since. Outlined in this and other research, benefits of nature include increased positivity and psychological health, as well as heightened energy levels, reduced stress hormone levels, blood pressure and nervous system arousal, and enhanced immune system function. Children with psychological diagnoses like impulsivity, hyperactivity and attention-deficit disorder have shown improved outcomes with exposure to nature.

In a 2019 University of Exeter study of 20,000 people, researchers found that people who spent at least two hours per week in nature showed improved signs of health and psychological well-being.

This and other similar studies have prompted a movement in the medical world, and some physicians have begun writing "nature prescriptions" for a wide range of conditions — meaning the newest "miracle" drug could be free and as close as your nearest park. Maybe it's time to explore how getting outside could help your health! 🦋

Summer Appeal Summary

During a precarious summer, Foothills Conservancy supporters were beacons of hope, affirming that land and water conservation remains a priority and that open space is a necessity.

A total of \$40,000 in challenge pledges from Susie Hamrick Jones and Gresham Orrison, members of Foothills Conservancy's board of directors, and some conservancy staff members were matched dollar-for-dollar through August 31. Thanks to the generosity of everyone who made a gift to this summer appeal, we reached our \$80,000 goal, despite the financial uncertainty looming throughout the summer months.

Foothills Conservancy's staff and board are grateful for the tremendous support of our donors who continue to give to our conservation mission year after year. Our land trust work thrives because of you. Thank you!

Year End Appeal

You still have time to make a 2020 gift! When you make a tax-deductible donation between now and December 31, every dollar supports our promise to continue protecting land and water resources for all, forever. Visit foothillsconservancy.org/donate to make your contribution today.

Great American Outdoors Act

On August 4, President Donald Trump signed the Great American Outdoors Act into law. The act accomplishes two goals: full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the establishment of a National Park and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund to provide necessary maintenance for facilities in our national parks, forests and recreation areas.

Established by Congress in 1964, the LWCF uses offshore oil royalties to invest in conservation projects across the country. Although it was originally authorized to use \$900 million each year for conservation projects, it has never received full funding — until now. LWCF supports federal land programs like national parks and forests, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. Funds from LWCF also flow to each state for high priority public park and conservation projects.

Thank You 2019 Donors

GIVING LEVELS

Horizon Society

Heritage	\$10,000+
Legacy	\$5,000+
Patron	\$2,500+
Benefactor	\$1,000+
Steward	\$500+
Preserver	\$250+
Protector	\$100+
Conservator	\$50+
Friend	\$35+
Student	\$20+

HERITAGE

Larry & Patricia Clark
George & Ann Costello
Hal Davis
Jacques & Diane Geitner
Gresham Orrison & Susie Hamrick Jones
Randy & Lea Loftis, Jr.
Dee North
Allie Sitts
Jim & Chip Sitts
Brad & Shelli Stanback
Fred & Alice Stanback
Tim Sweeney
Linda Wall
Chip & Martha Whitfield

LEGACY

4 Corners Land Surveying, LP
Rob Gage & Amy Cox
Jeff & Carol Mackinney
George & Paula Moore
Jeremy & Virginia Purbrick
Clay & Joani Richardson

PATRON

Timothy & Margaret Andrews
Gary & Anna Boarman
Roby Braswell & Julie Dickison
Todd & Melinda Morse
Doug & Gwen Veazey
William & Shirley Winston

BENEFACTOR

Aram & Linda Attarian
Sam & Caroline Avery

Ray & Dawn Barnette
Donna Benner
Lynn Black
Tom & Beth Blanton
Steve & Mary Boehm
Bill & Gwen Bradley
Mark & Karen Brazinski
Javier & Yngrid Chacon
Mike & Brooke Chamberlain
Philip & Annette Chamberlain
Tom & Geneva Coffey
Nancy Collett
Rountree & Ellen Collett
Neil & Claire Coty
Bridgette Davis
Deborah Davis
Ed McMillan & Margie Divish
Fletcher & Kristy Edens
Tom & Sandra Foster
Jimmy & Mary Lou Furr
Lex & Michelle Garey
Grandfather Mountain
Stewardship Foundation
Steve Hairfield
Peter & Margaret Hampson
Seth & Kelly Hawkins
Greg & Paula Hoogerland
Patrick Horan
Winston & Laura Hoy
Indigo Nature Retreat
Bryan & Kathryn Jones
Kim & Kathleen Jurell
Bob & Shari Kehler
Rob & Katie Kirby
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Joe & Kate Lagedrost
BJ & Ellen Losch
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George & Carter Brooks
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John & Terri Martino
Gary McGill
Jason & Angela Merchev
Lee & Beth Neale
Stephen & Lisa Nikrant
Jeff & Susan Noble
Chuck & Jerelen Ohrt

Nancy Phifer
Susan & Bob Powers
Quaker Meadows Women of the Church
Craig & Lisa Romer
Jennifer Kersten & Tim Roush
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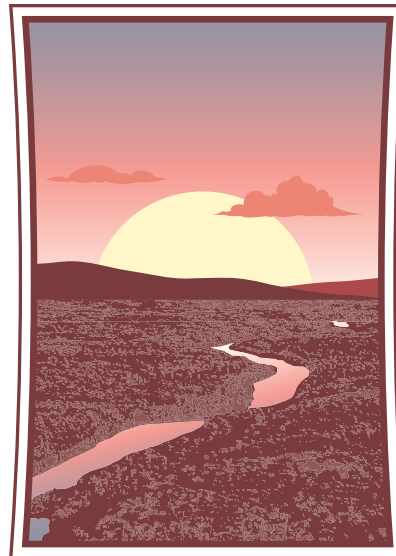
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FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY OF NORTH CAROLINA

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The Horizon Society honors those individuals, businesses, foundations and organizations who contribute \$1,000 or more during the year in support of Foothills Conservancy's land and water resource conservation work. Business members of the Horizon Society receive special logo recognition on our website and in our newsletter. For more information on supporting Foothills Conservancy at a higher level, contact Associate Director Beth Willard-Patton at 828-437-9930 or bwillardpatton@foothillsconservancy.org.



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FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY OF NORTH CAROLINA

PINNACLE SOCIETY

Foothills Conservancy's Pinnacle Society recognizes thoughtful people who have chosen to leave a lasting legacy of land and water conservation through a bequest to the conservancy — either in their will or by naming the conservancy as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement plan, such as an IRA. We honor and thank these generous forward-thinking individuals. For more information on making a planned gift to Foothills Conservancy and becoming a member of the Pinnacle Society, please call Associate Director Beth Willard-Patton at 828-437-9930.

Please let Foothills Conservancy know if you've made plans to include us in your estate so we may thank you.

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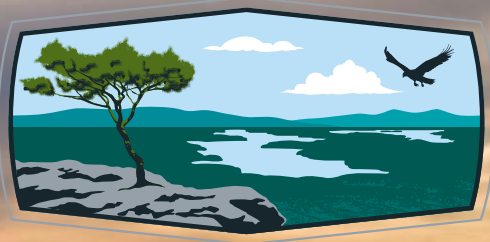
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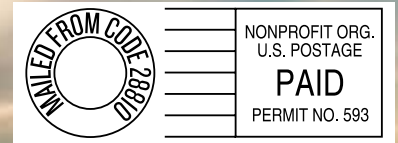
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The staff at Foothills Conservancy would like to thank the hundreds of dedicated volunteers and donors who have championed the mission of our organization to protect over 61,000 acres in our service area since 1995. As we approach the conservancy's 25th birthday this December, we remain forever grateful for your support as we continue our work to conserve our precious land, water and culture of this Western North Carolina region.

Left to right: Tom Kenney, Isaac Crouch, Sophie Elliott, Ryan Sparks, Beth Willard-Patton, Andrew Kota, Brittany Watkins